

VZCZCXRO0508
OO RUEHPA
DE RUEHOS #0073/01 0531540
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O R 221540Z FEB 10
FM AMCONSUL LAGOS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0041
INFO ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/COMUSNAVEUR NAPLES IT
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC
RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RULSJGA/DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION WASHINGTON DC
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 LAGOS 000073

SIPDIS
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PASS TO AMEMBASSY MALABO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/22
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [ECON](#) [KCOR](#) [SOCI](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: LAGOS GOVERNOR WANTS U.S. SUPPORT FOR CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS

CLASSIFIED BY: Blair, Donna, CG, State, Lagos; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In a meeting with Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Johnnie Carson on February 6, Lagos Governor Babatunde Fashola (Action Congress - AC) asked the U.S. to continue to insist publicly on scrupulous respect for Nigeria's Constitution. Fashola also described his administration's plans for addressing Lagos State's infrastructure deficits, his hopes for a fraud inquiry into the 2007 Nigerian elections. He denied that ethnic or religious ideology caused recent violence in Jos State. Fashola asked the U.S. to speak to Abuja about removing federal impediments to the Lagos State light rail project, and requested that the U.S. strive for a deeper understanding of Nigerian culture. Assistant Secretary Carson noted that the U.S. is watching Lagos State with keen interest and wished Fashola success in his endeavors. END SUMMARY.

FASHOLA CONCERNED ABOUT NIGERIAN CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS

¶2. (C) In a meeting on February 6 at his residence in Lagos, Lagos Governor Fashola expressed concern about Nigeria's constitutional process to Assistant Secretary Carson. He asserted that North-South power-sharing rotation agreements made as a part of an informal negotiation process should not supersede the Constitution, adding that "it is clear now that if the President becomes unable to serve, the Vice President should succeed him." He noted that, looking beyond the succession to the next election, Northern State Governors seem to be organizing strongly with electoral momentum "heading north."

¶3. (C) Fashola suggested that adherence to the Constitution

will lead to electoral reforms, but stressed that electoral reforms are not the main concern at this time because "they won't take us to a destination." He pointed out that new electoral laws appeared after every Nigerian election, resulting in confusion about acceptable conduct at polling stations. Fashola noted that the Coalition for Democratic Reforms (CODR) is working on electoral reforms in Nigeria, and asked the U.S. to consult with them regarding the current electoral situation.

14. (C) The festering issue of Nigerian federal versus state power is an issue for the future, not now, Fashola said.

15. (C) Fashola welcomed support from Washington to ensure compliance with the Nigeria's Constitution as the country navigates President Yar'Adua's absence and deals with the issue of succession.

ECONOMIC CHANGE COMING TO NIGERIA

LAGOS 00000073 002 OF 005

16. Governor Fashola claimed that Lagos State grew unchecked for 35 years with military and other administrators who did not plan for the future. As a result, Fashola found Lagos crippled by abysmal infrastructure when he took office three years ago. He has since worked to rectify the infrastructure deficit, including planning nine, new medical centers for women and children, and a clean water system. Fashola believes these and other infrastructure projects will have a trickle down effect - reducing crime and creating jobs.

17. (C) Fashola added that he believes positive economic change is already starting in Nigeria. Other Governors come to him and ask questions to learn about economic reform. He thinks that when other states begin to function better, fewer people will migrate into Lagos State, which will help alleviate the state's unchecked population growth.

18. However, Lagos State needs both local and foreign investment in short- and long-term projects to reduce the infrastructure burden caused by exponential population growth. He complained that progress on projects and reforms is often impeded by federal obstacles.

19. (C) Fashola raised the issue of corruption but argued that Nigeria cannot begin to resolve this issue until people's desperation is addressed.

FASHOLA ADVOCATES INQUIRY INTO THE 2007 NIGERIAN ELECTIONS

110. (C) Fashola advocated convening an inquiry to investigate

fraud during the 2007 Nigerian elections, arguing that it is necessary to hold election officials accountable. He claimed that prosecuting officials for wrong-doing would "put us well on the way" to electoral reform. In the past, he noted, Nigerians' hopes were dashed in every election, adding that hope for building democracy depends on credible national elections in 2011. Fashola indicated that, in contrast to earlier elections, voter registration processes and polling booths exist, but questioned whether voter registration efforts are credible.

¶11. (C) In spite of pointed questioning from Assistant Secretary Carson, Fashola declined to comment on whether Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Chairman Maurice Iwu will have sufficient time between now and the 2011 national elections to implement effective electoral reforms. Fashola did eventually offer that Iwu so far has not provided impartial leadership, not demonstrated courage in his job as "election umpire," and given no indication that he will act fairly in the future.

LAGOS 00000073 003 OF 005

POWER VACUUM IN THE ABSENCE OF YAR'ADUA

¶12. (C) Fashola underlined that President Yar'Adua's absence creates a power vacuum on a national level, adding "there is no voice in the center." He noted a "commendable crack" in the political facade, due to the Minister of Information's courageous appeal to the cabinet to end the current leadership impasse. He noted that problems of succession are common in many third world countries.

JOS VIOLENCE IS NEITHER ETHNIC NOR RELIGIOUS

¶13. (C) Fashola denied that recent violence in Jos had ethnic or religious origin. He claimed instead that a small number of inciters had taken advantage of people's ignorance to inflame the local population.

¶14. (C) The solution to this problem, he said, is more education and enlightenment. Nigerian society is too interwoven to fight a religious war, he asserted, taking as an example his own family: he is Muslim; his wife is Catholic; he has six siblings who are Christian; his wife's parents are Anglican; their children are a mix of Muslim and Catholic. In their bedroom, he noted, his prayer rug is on one side and his wife's rosary on the other. Since tribal affiliations cross religious lines, Fashola questioned whether religion fueled the Jos violence, and insisted that days of ethnic cleansing are gone forever. He commented that "people here are not ideologues." (NOTE: Fashola did not explain how "a small number of inciters" could spark violence in the absence of religious conflict. END NOTE.)

FASHOLA REQUESTS U.S. ASSISTANCE ON LAGOS LIGHT RAIL TRACK

¶15. (C) Assistant Secretary Carson described his ride along the tumultuous Badagry Road and asked about a proposed light rail project. Fashola expressed regret that Lagos State is unable to wholly fund a light rail line; however, he noted that World Bank and the Central Bank of Nigeria are now both interested. Fashola's plans call for Lagos State Government to build the light rail tracks and infrastructure, and then contract private concessionaires to run the trains. The light rail design is complete and a Chinese construction firm is ready to begin work, but federal authorities abruptly intervened to stop construction allegedly because one of the rails runs beside a federal road on federal property. Fashola asked Ambassador Carson to use his influence in Abuja to remove this federal impediment to the light rail project.

LAGOS MEGACITY PROJECT ON TRACK TO MEET ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

LAGOS 00000073 004 OF 005

¶16. (C) Fashola described the EKO Atlantic City project as a partnership with a developer designed to protect Victoria Island and Ikoyi from coastal erosion. Lagos State, he said, is working with a Dutch firm to reclaim lost land, with EKO Atlantic City to be built on the reclaimed land. According to Fashola, the Clinton Global Initiative has endorsed the Lagos MegaCity project, and Fashola believes that this endorsement will open doors to better pricing, procurement opportunities, and environmentally sensitive planning. Fashola claimed that his vision for the Lagos MegaCity is environmentally friendly.

U.S. NEEDS TO UNDERSTAND NIGERIAN CULTURE

¶17. (C) While in Chicago during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, Fashola said he wrote a letter to then candidate Obama in response to his speech in Germany because Fashola feels the U.S. does not understand Nigerians adequately. He predicted that rules that work in the west will not work in Nigeria without adaptation, using as an example the "winner-takes-all" outcome of litigation in western countries. He said such a judicial system would not work in Nigeria because tribal and village communities wish to arbitrate disputes. Nigerian values and communal way of life -- where a man is accountable for his brother as if the brother is his own son -- are intrinsically different from the western family model where children are expected to start paying their way independently at age 16. He thinks that development programs must take into account that Nigerians use communal ways to control systems.

A/S CARSON STRESSES IMPORTANCE OF LAGOS EXAMPLE

¶18. (C) Assistant Secretary Carson stressed that Fashola enjoys an outstanding reputation in Washington as one of Nigeria's very best Governors. Noting that Nigeria is in a period of political uncertainty due to the weak health of President Yar'Adua, Assistant Secretary Carson pointed out that "this is not the time for military or extra-legal power." He added that "Leaders like you can move forward within the framework of the constitution." Assistant Secretary Carson also expressed support for Fashola's infrastructure and MegaCity projects, and thanked the governor for explaining the integration of Nigeria through diversity. Acknowledging the vacuum in Abuja, Assistant Secretary Carson stressed Nigeria's need for leadership and expressed surprise that the Nigerian federal cabinet is not willing to acknowledge this. Assistant Secretary Carson issued an invitation to Governor Fashola to come to the U.S. to tell the story of Lagos State to Americans because many people are interested, and assured Fashola that Washington is watching Nigeria and especially Lagos State with acute interest. The importance of Lagos, Assistant Secretary Carson stressed, was that Fashola's success in encouraging economic reforms could have a catalytic influence on the rest of Nigeria. Assistant Secretary Carson concluded his remarks by stressing that the U.S. wants Nigeria to succeed -- lawfully, democratically and constitutionally.

LAGOS 00000073 005 OF 005

¶19. (C) COMMENT: Reforms in Lagos State, if successful, could serve as a model for reforms and good governance across the country. If Governor Fashola continues to perform well and attract both a national and international following during the next few years, he will almost certainly emerge as a major contender for Nigeria's Presidency. END COMMENT

¶20. (U) Congen Lagos coordinated this telegram with Embassy Abuja.

¶21. (U) Assistant Secretary Carson departed from Lagos before he had an opportunity to clear this telegram.
BLAIR